

What I Know Now That I Wish I Had Known Then

The stories below are personal stories from members of the Kentucky Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs Youth Advisory Council that are in college or have graduated from college. They have learned from their experiences and want to share a piece of advice for those who are still in high school and planning to enter college.

- My name is Samantha Littlepage. I have a cognitive learning disability. I had epilepsy when I was five to eleven years old. At the age of eleven I had brain surgery at Vanderbilt Medical Hospital and today at twenty two years old I am seizure free, but still struggle with learning new things every now and then. I graduated from Owensboro Community and Technical College with an Associate in Applied Science. Something I wish I knew in high school that I know now is 'how to study.' I believe every individual should be offered a 'how to study' course in middle school or freshmen year of high school. If I had a course on study techniques in high school I would have learned a much easier way to recall information. Instead, I had to find out on my own. In college I tried note cards, writing out information from the book, highlighting, group studies, and so forth. It took me several attempts before I found exactly which way of studying was best for me. If I had known this in high school and before college, I would have been more prepared for the battle of making good test grades, instead of failing a few, then finding my perfect way of studying.
- My name is Deana Downs. I am 21 years old, and I have cerebral palsy. The main thing I wish I would have known is when a person is planning to go to college it is good to get a second opinion. I wish I would have stood up for myself when it came to the classes I was signed for when I started college. I wasted a whole term on classes I didn't need or have to take. That was the only problem I had. I think people should know you're the student and you know what's best. Do what you want to do when it comes to your education. You're paying for it, and it's your life, not theirs.
- My name is Amanda Velez. I wish I had known that sometimes even if the disability coordinator at the college wants to help you, they do not always have the power to do so. I wish I had known that "handicap" or "wheelchair accessible" is sometimes synonymous with "bare minimum legally required," and usually it is less than that. I wish I had known I had the power to do more to combat these things. I wish I had known more about outside resources to help me do well in school and in the surrounding community. I wish I had known my legal rights so I would know how to respond when certain problems did arise. Even if I had known all of these things, I still would have gone to college—the positive experiences of living away at school have definitely outweighed the negative.
- My name is Kirsten Barracough. I have cerebral palsy which affects my physical mobility as well as how quickly I am able to process information. Despite the many challenges my physical condition brings, I am in my third year of college at the University of Louisville. Every day in college has presented something new for me to learn. One thing I wish I'd understood better about college while I was in high school is the increased responsibility of a disabled college student to articulate their own needs. In high school accommodations seemed to be developed for my success. Not so in college. I have to know what I need and I am responsible for getting what I need through the Disability Resource Center. For example, I took a Biology lab last semester in which I needed some assistance with getting materials, measuring, etc. I was assigned a student to take notes for me, through DRC, but he was not required to help with the other aspects of the lab. I had to state what I needed and ask for his help. The bottom line is, it's not automatic that people will know what you need or help you in college. Don't be afraid to stick up for yourself and what you need to be successful.

Again, the stories above are personal stories from members of the Kentucky Commission for Children with Special Health Care Needs Youth Advisory Council that are in college or have graduated from college. They have learned from their experiences and want to share this information for those who are still in high school and planning to enter college. If you are a student in high school who has a disability and is thinking about going to college the important thing to remember is it is never too early to start making plans to attend college. You can do this by talking with your school Guidance Counselor, contacting a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor or contacting the Disability Resource Coordinator at a college you are interested in attending. Going to college can be one of the best experiences you will have, and can greatly improve your chances for getting a job and moving on into adulthood. So, don't be afraid to reach for your goals.